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SIPDIS

FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE FROM AMBASSADOR LUNSTEAD
DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, DRL/IRF
NSC FOR DORMANDY

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SUBJECT: WITH PEACE STUCK UP, WHAT ARE OUR MESSAGES

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead, reason 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) This was written the afternoon of Wednesday, Nov. 2, just before we heard about the cancellation of your trip to Sri Lanka. I wanted to send it anyway, first because I think you might find it interesting. Second, and more important, because it gives some ideas on a way forward, on the messages we want to send to Sri Lankans in an attempt to move the peace process along. Here's what was written yesterday.

2. (C) You will have seen both the scene-setter (Colombo 1792) and the update on political maneuvering here (Colombo 1794) which we have sent recently. Before you arrive, I want to give you my personal views on the two key points on the peace process here, describe how they will play into your visit and suggest an approach that could help push things forward.

It's All Local

3. (C) The first point is that progress on peace is largely hostage to domestic politics. This has two aspects. The first is the personal rivalry between former Prime Minister and now Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and President Chandrika Kumaratunga. This is more than just political rivalry--the two have an intense personal dislike for each other. This is heightened by Kumaratunga's desire to change the Constitution, for its two-term limit on the Presidency means her political shelf-life is running out. Ranil, of course, would be happy to see her consigned to political oblivion.

4. (C) In large part because of this rivalry, Ranil's United National Party (UNP) has refused to participate in the broad-based National Advisory Council on Peace (NAC) which Chandrika has set up. Ranil has offered his party's support once negotiations with the LTTE begin. I have talked with numerous senior members of the UNP in the past several weeks--they have all told me they thought the UNP should have agreed to participate in the NAC. It is Ranil, and his colleague G.L. Peiris, whose distaste for Chandrika is even greater, who have blocked this. I have found that Sri Lankans whom I talk to--including strong UNP supporters--disapprove of Ranil's decision.

5. (C) The second aspect is Chandrika's dependence on the Janatha Vimukta Peramuna (JVP) party for her coalition's survival. The JVP is a weird amalgam of antedated Marxism and Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. The important points are that the withdrawal of their 39 seats would topple her government, and that they are bitterly opposed to real concessions to the LTTE.

6. (C) The result is that Chandrika does not feel she has the ability to take bold steps to move the peace process forward. She might move forward despite the JVP--if she knew that she had the support of the UNP to do so. Failing that, the process is stagnating. Her National Advisory Council is, I believe, her attempt to build that support and isolate the JVP. Ranil understands that and does not want to help her out of her political difficulty--even though that is the only way peace can move forward.

7. (C) Ranil and Chandrika both do want to bring peace to the country. One of the differences between them is that Ranil has a vision, a strategy and tactics to get there. Chandrika has only a vision--strategy and tactics are not her forte as she operates impulsively. Ranil's strategy was to build peace on the ground as the negotiations proceeded so that the LTTE over time would change in reaction to the changing environment and, almost against its own will, morph into a political organization. His tactics were to keep going back into negotiations even when the Tigers seemed most obdurate and uncooperative. This was

not a bad plan. The only problem is that the Sri Lankan public decisively rejected Ranil at the last election. He continues to think, and act, as if this were their mistake, not his own.

18. (C) Several of my Ambassadorial predecessors here who dealt with both Ranil and Chandrika told me one thing: never attempt to persuade them to do something by appealing to the greater national interest. It just does not work. I have concluded they were absolutely right. The personal rivalry between the two, coupled with the Constitutional straight jacket in which Chandrika finds herself, only emphasizes this point. What one can do is appeal to their political instincts.

19. (C) With Chandrika, this means appealing to her sense of her destiny as the person to bring peace to Sri Lanka (her vision), while bolstering her courage by showing her that she will have the support of the international community if she moves forward. (Ranil explicitly looked for this, referring to it as his "international safety net.") With Ranil, it means telling him that his actions are hurting his own political standing, contributing to his own worst nightmare of a strengthened President Kumaratunga. They both need to hear that if they cannot move forward with some minimal cooperation, the international community will lose interest and they will be left to deal with this problem on their own. Further, our constant message has been that the primary US goals in Sri Lanka are promoting peace and prosperity because they are mutually reinforcing. By not grasping this opportunity now, both of them play into the hands of the JVP, and potentially other extremist parties, that will use the continued deteriorating economic situation to push for barriers to investment and trade (thus hurting typical Sri Lankans) and bolster their own political fortunes at the expense of both the UNP and SLFP.

LTTE Legitimacy

10. (C) The second point is the behavior of the LTTE. The peace process has always been based on GSL dealing with the LTTE, despite the Tigers' unsavory behavior, simply because they were the party that counted. As mentioned above in the comment on Ranil's strategy, the assumption was that over time the Tigers would shed their terrorist ways and their monolithic character as the blandishments of normal life showed them there was something better out there than a continued life in the jungle. The breakaway of the Karuna faction earlier this year could have been a sign that this strategy was working.

11. (C) Unfortunately, the reaction of Prabhakaran to all of this has been to become more, not less violent. He seems willing to wipe out any Tamil who dares to speak or act against him--even if they are acting in a political way. This is causing a backlash in the South. To put it in the most blunt terms, this raises a real question about the legitimacy of the Tigers as a negotiating partner. Certainly events have shown that the Tigers do not speak for all Tamils, even though they insist on recognition as the "sole spokesman" of the Tamils.

12. (C) I raise this question with myself and with others because I feel it is an issue we must keep in mind. My conclusion, however, is that we have to accept the Tigers as the negotiating partner in the peace process, and keep on working on them, at least for now. To abandon that strategy would be to abandon the peace process and, inevitably, return to war.

13. (C) The question, therefore, is how to influence Tiger behavior. This has a two-part answer. The first is to emphasize, as we have done all along, that Tiger behavior is unacceptable and must change. Coupled with that is our assertion--backed up by our military to military cooperation--that we stand behind the Government and that a Tiger decision to return to war would be disastrous for them. That is not a stick; it is a two-by-four that we use to hit them between the eyes. The second part is just as important, however. This is that if their behavior does change, our attitude toward them can change, and they can start down the road of political legitimacy. These messages should come out when you deal with the press here so that they can reach the Tigers.

Time to Move Forward

14. (C) This is an opportune time for your visit. While things are stuck up in some ways, the substantive differences between the parties on resumption of negotiations are actually quite small. You can give them a

nudge, as Mr. Akashi did just this week, and as Norwegian Foreign Minister Petersen will do right after you.

END TEXT

115. (C) That was the cable. We hope you will be able to reschedule your visit soon.

LUNSTEAD